

**PUBLIC SCHOOL ACADEMIES:
GROWTH, CAP ISSUES, AND ENROLLMENT**
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Public Act 362 of 1993 enacted legislation allowing for the creation, operation, and oversight of public school academies, often referred to as “charter schools”. For the purposes of State Aid, a charter school is defined as a public school authorized by a State university, a community college, an intermediate district, or a local school district. The first academies opened their doors in September 1994, with 526 full-time equivalent students (FTEs) attending the three facilities. Another two charters enrolled students in the winter of the same year. By the beginning of the next school year, a total of 36 charter schools had opened, enrolling more than 5,000 FTEs. This article explores the increasing numbers of public school academies (PSAs), the charter “cap”, and historical and projected pupil counts.

Figure 1, entitled Five Years of PSA Growth, tracks the growth in the numbers of charter schools open and enrolling between 1994-95 and 1998-99. Table 1, County Locations of PSAs, illustrates where the schools are settling, arranged by county over the same five-year period. Charter schools have concentrated in certain areas; seven counties (Ingham, Kalamazoo, Kent, Oakland, Ottawa, Saginaw, and Wayne) account for nearly 70% of the academies. Correspondingly, the academies located in these counties accounted for 80% of PSA membership in fiscal year 1998-99.

Figure 1 illustrates that there were 143 public school academies open and enrolling students in the 1998-99 school year. Of those 143, a total of 116 charters were authorized by universities. The remaining 27 academies were authorized by a community college, school district or intermediate district. Section 502 of the Revised School Code caps the number of contracts for PSAs issued by State universities at 150 beginning with the 1998-99 school year. This means that no more than 34 new academies authorized by universities may legally open in the 1999-2000 school year.

At this time, the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA) lists 15 new academies authorized to open and begin enrolling with approval of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and an additional 29 pending or conditionally authorized. “Conditionally authorized” means that a charter school has submitted an application and been approved by an authorizing board; however, the school must comply with further regulations (such as fire inspections, electrical code, or leasing arrangements) before applying for approval by the Superintendent in order to begin enrolling students and receiving State Aid.¹⁾ A “pending” status is awarded to an academy that has submitted an application for a charter to an authorizing board, but the board has not yet reviewed and authorized the petition.

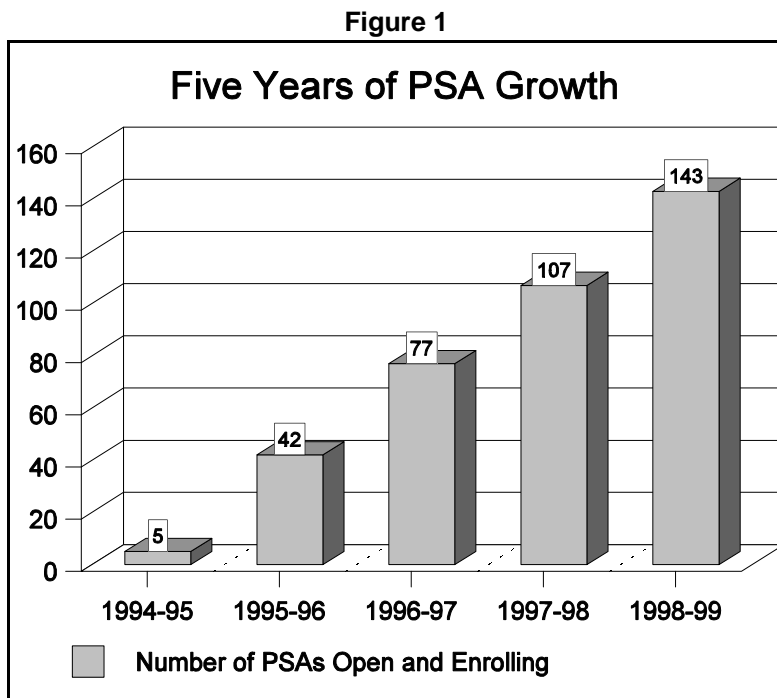


Table 1: County Locations of PSAs

County	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	Total
ALLEGAN			1			1
ANTRIM					1	1
BAY		1				1
BERRIEN				1		1
BRANCH		1				1
CASS					2	2
CHARLEVOIX		1	1			2
CHIPPEWA		1				1
EATON			1			1
EMMETT		1				1
GENESEE		2				2
GLADWIN			1			1
GD. TRAVERSE			1			1
HILLSDALE				1	1	2
INGHAM		3	2			5
IOSCO			1			1
ISABELLA			1	1		2
JACKSON		1			1	2
KALAMAZOO			1		4	5
KENT	2	4	4	5	3	18
LAPEER				1		1
LIVINGSTON		1	1			2
MACOMB	1					1
MANISTEE			1	1		2
MARQUETTE				1		1
MECOSTA					1	1
MENOMINEE		1				1
MIDLAND	1		1			2
MONTCALM				1		1
MONROE					1	1
MUSKEGON		1			1	2
OAKLAND		4	2	2		8
OCEANA			1			1
OTTAWA		1	3	1		5
SAGINAW		3		2	1	6
ST. CLAIR		1			1	2
VAN BUREN					1	1
WASHTENAW		1	1	1	1	4
WAYNE	1	9	10	13	17	50
STATEWIDE	5	37	35	30	36	143

¹⁾ A PSA receives a per pupil foundation allowance equal to the lesser of the foundation allowance of the district in which the academy is located, or \$500 above the basic allowance. The funding consists entirely of State dollars, since charters do not have the constitutional authority to levy mills.

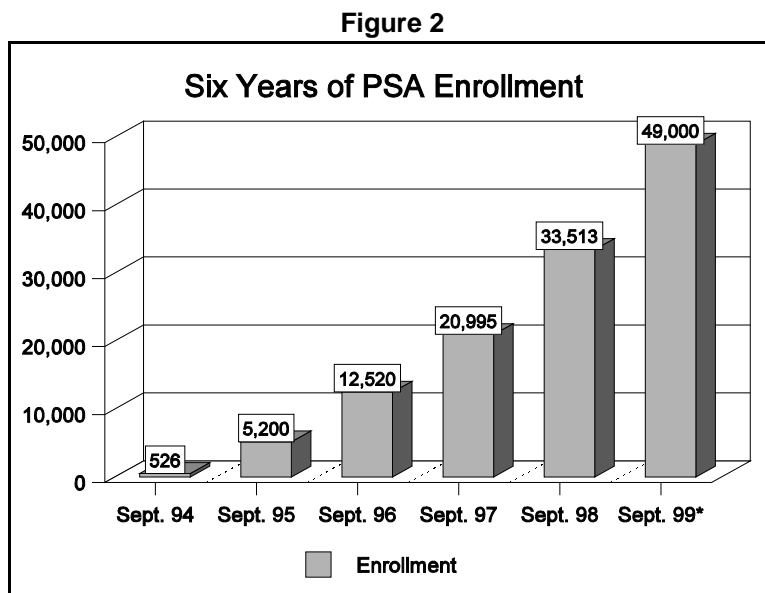
If all of the charters that are conditionally authorized or pending were able to comply with all regulations and open this fall, the number of university-authorized PSAs capable of enrolling students **would exceed the cap**. The law is silent as to any method of determining which schools among the number authorized may open, or how to deal with the situation if more than 150 university charters submit enrollments for State Aid payments.

At this time, however, because the beginning of the school year is near, the Department of Education does not believe that all of the conditionally authorized or pending charters will be able to open and enroll students for the first semester. Legislation may be necessary, though, to address the situation if more than 150 university-authorized PSAs do open, or to provide guidelines to the Department to determine which authorized schools may open. Possible methods include a random lottery of new authorizations, giving those charters that were authorized first the right to open first until the cap is met, or specifying criteria (e.g., location, mission) for diverse openings of charters up to the number capped in the Revised School Code. Another legislative option would be to raise or remove the cap on the number of university-authorized charters.

Once an academy has opened, there are no caps on the numbers or grades of pupils educated. An interesting phenomenon with charter schools is the expansion of grades offered over time. It is widely believed that educating elementary pupils is less expensive than educating secondary students. High schools often offer sports, band, choir, clubs, laboratories, advanced technology and other expensive projects. Secondary teachers and administrators may have more advanced degrees or experience than elementary teachers have, and might be awarded higher salaries, resulting in increased costs. To avoid this, many charters begin operations only educating K-8 pupils.

Nevertheless, when these children reach the eighth grade, for example, their parents often request that the academies add the next grade, so that the students can remain in the charter school. This also happens if a charter was initially offering a limited number of grades, such as K through 3; the charter may add Grade 4 the next year, Grade 5 the following year, and so on in order to continue educating its pupils. The data bear out this phenomenon: 64% of PSAs have added at least one grade over the course of time, and 12 charters have evolved from purely providing elementary education to educating in the secondary arena as well. However, the majority of academies (58%) continue solely to provide elementary education. Some of these charters may extend past Grade 8 in the future if there is pressure from the parental community to continue educating their children at the charter school.

With the expansion in both the numbers of charter schools and the grades offered, there has been an increase in the number of pupils attending PSAs. Figure 2, entitled Six Years of PSA Enrollment, illustrates the tremendous growth in enrollments over time at the academies. It also displays projections (*) for the upcoming school year, 1999-2000, based upon consensus reached at the Revenue Estimating Conference on May 17, 1999. Enrollment in PSAs will represent approximately 3% of the total K-12 population in the next school year based upon these projections.



Most of the pupils initially enrolling in PSAs are coming from public schools. According to studies conducted, 65%-75% of total enrollment comes from the public schools initially, with 25%-35% of the pupils educated previously in nonpublic arenas or entering school for the first time as kindergartners. It is strongly cautioned, however, that because of a lack of previous schooling data, these numbers may not be entirely accurate. Further research is needed to explore this aspect of enrollment more fully.

This article was designed to inform readers of the changing aspects of public school academies. Specific issues addressed included increasing numbers of charter schools, locations of the schools, the impending dilemma with the charter school "cap", and growth in pupil enrollment at PSAs. As more data become available, it will be possible to perform further analyses related to pupil assessment scores, trends in growth, financial structures, and demand for services.